

# Fulbright's Folly . . . . . By William S. White

## An Irresponsible Speech

STATINTL

Senator J. William Fulbright's attack upon the basic honesty of this Government's intervention in the Dominican Republic against the possibility of a Communist takeover has created a poignant crisis for the orderly conduct of American foreign policy.



White

Not in 30 years, at least, has a chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee so bitterly ranged himself against an emergency action of his Nation abroad and against so vast a majority of his own col-

leagues in the Senate. Wherever Senator Fulbright retains influence abroad—and this influence is substantial both among the hopefully neutralist-minded and the automatic critics of any use of military force for almost any reason—the position of the United States has been dreadfully injured.

For that world still believes, not unnaturally, that Senator Fulbright, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, speaks from within the high councils of this Nation. To much of that world his embittered testimony against this Government's course in Latin America is turning state's evidence and assisting the prosecution of his own side.

WHAT IS even more painfully awkward, however, is the harm that has been done, for the first time irreparably, by Senator Fulbright to himself as officially the chief Democratic foreign affairs spokesman in Congress.

Already, by personal proclamations of a personal foreign policy which repeatedly harassed the late President Kennedy in world crises no less than they harass President Johnson now, Senator Fulbright had gravely weakened the effective consensus of collective judgment which his committee had traditionally embodied.

Now, in the deep institutional sense he has destroyed his own voice as well. He will retain his post; but in reality he can hardly speak hereafter for more than Senator Fulbright of Arkansas. He can hardly speak for the Foreign Relations Committee, for the Administration, for the Democratic Party, or for anything save a tiny minority of the Senate in which he sits.

For it is not simply with President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk that Fulbright has broken. He has also broken the unwritten rule of the game, a code which demands of those holding high committee chairmanships—and uniquely the chairmanship of Foreign Relations—a degree of selfrestraint and personal responsibility not demanded of the rank and file.

It is a tragic case of a good man's private judgment carried to such extremes as to become alien to the controlling spirit and action of the most tolerant political forum in the world. Senatorial privilege reaches far. "Free speech"—any Senator's undoubted right to speak his full mind—has no formal limitation. It does, however, carry an unalterable qualification arising from the plain facts of life. A man may say what he wishes; but no man, not even a Senator, can claim special exemption for himself from the consequences of what he says.

CONCRETELY, Senator Fulbright's departure from the national and Senate consensus is easy to explain. At bottom, he admits that there was some Communist participation in the Dominican Republic but he argues that maybe it was not much and in any event nobody can say for certain that it would have been enough to set up another Castro Cuba in this hemisphere.

He honestly fears we are so preoccupied with the Communist peril that we are adopting "reactionary" attitudes against good revolutions as well as bad. The sad and self-evident truth, however, is that nobody bearing the ultimate and terrible responsibility to see to it that there shall never be another Castro Cuba can afford the splendid luxury of this ivory tower view. Such a luxury was, in fact, adopted as to Cuba when Fidel Castro was coming up. Its end was to carry the whole globe to the edge of nuclear holocaust. The frightful realities of the cold war do not submit to the perfectly honorable, relaxed detachment of collegiate debating exercise.

© 1965, United Features Syndicate